

Sue Anne Schleit

P. O. Box 434
Valier, Montana 59486

28 Jan 09

Dear Janice Hoppes:

This is getting ridiculous.

I have lived at this address for 30 yrs now. When I signed up for absentee I meant it.

Is there not some way to reset the default position?

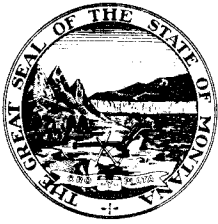
This is as silly as pressuring everyone to use their SS# as a driver's license #, thereby making it much easier to steal someone's identity.

If it cannot be changed, perhaps you can tell me whose bright idea all this paperwork is?

Sincerely,
[Signature]

This letter was received by Janice Hoppes, Pondera County Clerk and Recorder, in reference to the Permanent Absentee Confirmation request letter. Voters repeatedly say why all the paperwork, just mail my ballot!!

Janice Hoppes



The Big Sky Country

MONTANA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

REPRESENTATIVE DONALD HEDGES
HOUSE DISTRICT 97

HELENA ADDRESS:
PO BOX 200400
HELENA, MONTANA 59620-0400
PHONE: (406) 444-4800

emeritus

COMMITTEES:
AGRICULTURE, CHAIRMAN
STATE ADMINISTRATION
TRANSPORTATION

HOME ADDRESS:
70 SINGLETREE RD
ANTELOPE, MONTANA 59211
PHONE: (406) 286-5426
March 17, 2009

To: House State Administration Committee, The Honorable Dennis Himmelberger,
Chair

Subject: Senate Bill 394 Expand types of elections by mail ballot

Please give favorable consideration to this proposed legislation for the following reasons.

- 1: Being able to cast a ballot from your kitchen table is very convenient and may increase voter participation.
2. Election integrity using a mail ballot is a well tested system.
3. Election costs vary by district and the number of polling places. Mail ballots reduce election costs in many areas.

A down side might be in a slight delay in obtaining election returns if mail postmarks are the day of the election.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature of Don Hedges in black ink.
Don Hedges

409 E Lasater Ave
Plentywood MT 59254

March 16, 2009

Montana State Administration Committee
State Capitol
Helena, MT 59601

Dear Mr. Chairman and members of the committee:

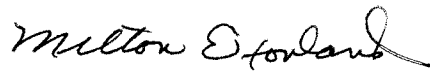
RE: Senate Bill 394

Sheridan County began using mail ballot elections for city/town and special district elections many years ago while I was the county clerk and recorder.

We immediately noticed a much larger voter turnout and it was a relief to not have to recruit all the election judges that are needed to have polling places open.

I can think of no downside to giving counties the option to hold all elections by mail ballot and I am encouraging you to support SB 394.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Milton E. Hovland". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Milton E. Hovland

Chinook Senior Center—Director

My name is Marilynne Berger, I'm director at the center. Working with seniors we support SB 394, the mail ballot issue. Living in rural Montana it is not always easy to get to the polls. Also there a lot of seniors with sight problems and would be able to have a family member assist.

The cost to rural counties would be a help plus the time spent finding help at the poll. That is why we as seniors are in support of SB 394.

Marilynne Berger Director

*Marilynne Berger
Director*

Thursday, February 26, 2009

Re: Senate Bill 394

I am in favor of doing a mail ballot election. It is getting harder and harder to find people to run the polling places. It would be cost effective for the county to do a mail ballot election.

I came from Washington State and the county I lived in was mail ballot only. It's easier to vote in the privacy of your own home than to try to get to your polling place before or after work.

Save the State and Counties money by voting for SB394.



Donna M. Ross

Mr. Chairman and Committee Members

My name is Art Kleinjan. I am from Blaine County and have been involved in county government for over 25 years. I am writhing you today in support of SB 394, the mail ballot issue. We have used total mail ballots in the cities of Harlem and Chinook for at least three years. The turn out in these elections was tremendously higher and the cost of the elections considerably cheaper. Another problem that occurs in our rural areas is getting people to work the elections. There are times someone does not show up at the last minute and we use an untrained substitute or go short handed. Neither are good for the voters. Our County has a high number of elderly people making the mail ballot an ideal situation for them.

I feel the costs that are saved and the additional people that get the opportunity to vote and safety of mail ballots speak for them selves. There fore I urge you to support SB 394. Thank you very much.

Art Kleinjan

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Art Kleinjan". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the printed name.

312 North 6th Street
Hamilton, MT
March 6, 2009

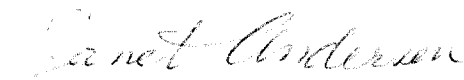
Regina Plattenberg
Office of the Recorder
Suite C
215 South 4th Street
Hamilton, MT

Dear Ms. Plattenberg,

My husband and I hope that Hamilton, along with the whole state of Montana, will choose to have citizens cast their ballots in all elections with a mail-in ballot. We are senior citizens (and I am handicapped) and found that often there was a long line of voters waiting to vote. Since the mail-in ballot became available, that is the only way we vote. We found it so much easier than trying to find a handicap parking spot and sometimes fighting inclement weather on election day. Most of our friends also mail in their ballots.

We like the idea of the cost savings that will occur by going to a mail-in ballot. It would be a good idea to have secure drop boxes for these ballots, further cutting the cost of mailing the ballots.

Sincerely yours,


Janet Andersen

March 17, 2009

Dear Members of the Committee,

My name is Linda Bartnes and I reside at 117 N Jefferson St in Plentywood. I am writing to express my support for Senate Bill 394.

Since I live in a rural community it has been much more convenient for me to vote via the absentee ballot. I think that giving the local governments the option to hold mail ballot elections can only increase voter participation. Weather is always a factor here in northeast Montana. When it is storming and the roads are blocked, voter turnout is always very low. Holding mail ballot elections would be much more convenient for the elderly who have to find transportation to a polling place or depend on others for help. It would also be very nice for working people with very full schedules to be able to sit down in their own home and complete their mail in ballot without being rushed. I am sure the cost savings in tax dollars for holding mail ballot election would be considerable. Finding polling places and setting them up and hiring and training poll workers is very costly and time consuming. As you know, we taxpayers are always impressed at any savings of our tax dollars!

Although every community may not want the mail in ballot, please at least give the local governments the opportunity to conduct the elections by mail in ballot.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Linda Bartnes".

Linda Bartnes

March 18, 2009

The Honorable Dennis Himmelberger, Chair
House State Administration Committee
PO Box 200500
Helena, MT 59620-0500

RE: SB 394: Expand Types of Elections That May be Conducted by Mail Ballot
Election

Dear sir,

I am writing to encourage you to **vote yes on SB 394**. I have been an election judge for over 15 years and think that expanding voter's right to choose to vote by mail is a good one. Given all the other facets of everyday life that we do remotely, such as shop via the Internet, bank online or text message, I think that it is clear that people want to conduct their personal business at their own convenience and on their own schedule. Mail ballots are but one more way to fit this most important duty into the hectic lives of voters.

In Sheridan County, I would guess that all voters desiring to use the AutoMark machine are transported to the polls in a motor vehicle. We would still have that machine available to everyone at the Clerk and Recorder's Office in Plentywood. The office is accessible by elevator and the only difference in voting at the "place of deposit" would be to drive to Plentywood rather than Westby or Medicine Lake. As most voters requiring the AutoMark machine would be going to Plentywood anyway in the weeks prior to an election for things such as food, fuel or medical needs, I would not think that it would be a hardship for them.

Our local election staff at the Courthouse is very professional and aware of the privacy issues for voters and the ballot process. They are well aware of the law and tailor our elections within that law. I assume that that could be the same throughout the state. They want the election results to mirror the opinions of those allowed to vote as closely as possible. Please give them credit for their knowledge and judgment of the election process and support them in this bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Danette L. Rasmussen".

Danette L. Rasmussen
596 Ator Crk
Antelope MT 59211-9713

February 26, 2009

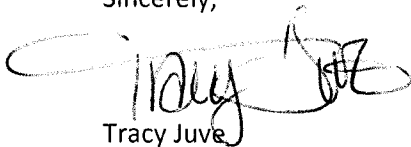
Members of the Committee:

I have been an employee in the Clerk & Recorder's office for over 9 years and am writing this letter in support of Senate Bill 394. There are far too many issues that a mail ballot election would resolve, but I have listed a few of my personal concerns below.

1. Lack of interest in election workers. (I personally have had to leave my office short staffed and work at a polling place.)
2. Lack of transportation to the polls.
3. Intimidation by poll watchers.
4. Lack of funding for the cost of the elections.
5. At the poll's the elector may find there are issue's or candidate's they were unaware of and they feel pressure to chose without the necessary time or research.
6. Confusion about where to vote.

I feel that any individual that is opposing this bill should come and observe an election, start to finish, and I believe that will help to answer any questions they may have on why we feel so strongly about this issue.

Sincerely,



Tracy Juve

February 26, 2009

Members of the Committee:

I would like to voice my support of Senate Bill 394 for mail-ballot voting for the following reasons:

FROM THE VOTERS VIEWPOINT:


1. No standing in line.
2. Able to study the ballot and take your time when voting.
3. Don't have to worry about juggling your time between work and family to get to the polls.
4. No more trying to find a ride to the polls in low income areas and isolated rural areas where transportation can be a problem.
5. No confusion as to which polling place to go.
6. Provides convenience for the voter.

FROM THE ELECTION OFFICE VIEWPOINT:

1. No training of poll judges.
2. No obtaining of poll judges.
3. Mail ballot should help to keep up current voter mailing lists.
4. No accumulating, packing, and unpacking of all polling place supplies.
5. No acquiring a means to get all the polling supplies to all the polls in a timely manner.
6. Even with the increased cost of postage and mailing supplies, it should be cheaper for a mail ballot.
7. Increased number of voters because of the convenience.
8. No more worrying about obtaining handicap accessible polling places.

In conclusion, I believe voting by mail ballot is a worthy concept. Also, in studying the various articles written about mail voting in other states that have tried it, the concept has received favorable review.

Respectfully,



Darlene A. Twitchell
6743 Road 2052
Wolf Point, MT 59201

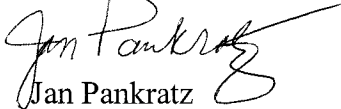
Jan Pankratz
HC 66 Box 62
Lustre MT 59225

Members of the Committee,

I am writing in support of SB 394. Allowing the option of mail ballot elections in each county would improve the integrity of elections. Voter verification through signature comparison, ability to have time to peruse the ballot to make informed decisions and voting in the privacy of your home environment are plusses for the elector. The cost savings to the taxpayers is also a positive consideration. The alleviation of hiring and training poll workers would be a huge savings of time, money and sanity for Election Administrators.

Mail ballot elections have been successful in other states. Montana has been a front runner in putting forth the best effort in election management to accommodate the voter and I see mail ballot elections as another step forward.

Sincerely,


Jan Pankratz

House Administration Committee
SB 394 Room 455 9:00 am

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

My name is John Gallaher and I live just west of Thompson Falls in Sanders County. I have been disabled and used a wheelchair for over 35 years and have never missed an election, unless I chose to. The reason is because I vote absentee and have in every election since 1974. It's simple. I'll get my ballot and voter's pamphlet at least a couple of weeks before the election. If needed, my caregiver will help spread it out on my table, which is exactly the right height for me to write comfortably. I can look up anything I might question on different measures, levies or initiatives, then mark, sign and seal it. Then I can either mail it or have my caregiver drop it off on the next trip to town. I've never had any problem voting this way, and as far as privacy goes, it doesn't get any better than at home!

In 2004, my County Election Administrator, Pat Ingraham, asked me if I'd come by and try their new AutoMARK machine and give my opinion on how practical it would be for people with a disability. I was impressed by the technology, but was concerned about cost, especially in a rural County.

Right then, I thought we should go to mail ballots because I would rather see that money go to provide more accessible restrooms, push-button electric door openers or something that would benefit people with a disability every day, not just once or twice a year.

I believe every legal citizen in this country has a duty to first inform themselves and then vote! If they move, three weeks is plenty of time to make an address change if they're a concerned voter. People have to take some responsibility for themselves, and with newspapers, TV and now the Internet, it's pretty hard not to know when there's an election.

Anytime, I hear a lot about energy independence and the size of the carbon footprint we leave. I live 30 miles round-trip from my polling place and have to watch my spending. Money is usually an issue with the majority of people that have a disability. But if you'll pass this bill, to vote, the most I'll have to do is buy a couple of stamps. I won't have to find a driver election day, I can save gas money and wear and tear on my vehicle and it's simple, cheap and private. I completely support SB 394.

John M. Gallaher
1227 Blue Slide Rd
Thompson Falls, MT 59873

OFFICE OF
CLERK AND RECORDER



Tammy D. Lauer

512 California Avenue

COUNTY OF LINCOLN

(406) 293-7781 Ext. 200

E-mail: lcclerk@libby.org

Libby, Montana 59923

Fax 1-406-293-8577

March 9, 2009

To Whom It May Concern:

I am the Clerk and Recorder and Election Administrator for Lincoln County. I am writing in support of SB394. It has been my experience over the past few elections that a good percentage of our elderly and disabled voters already vote by mail through the absentee process. We have had a few mail ballot elections for schools and fire districts and it has been proven that we have a larger voter turnout with mail ballots.

Over the past year with the primary and general elections of 2008, many of the voters in Lincoln County showed an interest in mail ballot elections. With the rising prices of gasoline, aging population of our county, busy lifestyles of the residents, and weather being factors in the polling process, people are ready for an easier way to vote. What could be easier than voting in your own home?

The amount of money that the mail ballot process would save the counties in our state is very hard to ignore. I know Lincoln County could use the money in many other places. It would seem that mail ballot elections are a much wiser use of the taxpayer's money.

Please support SB394 and let the mail ballot process prove itself.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tammy D. Lauer", is written over a horizontal line.

Tammy D. Lauer

Clerk and Recorder/Election Administrator

LINCOLN COUNTY
Election Dept.
512 California Avenue
Libby, MT 59923

March 9, 2009

To Whom It May Concern:

I am a Deputy Clerk for Lincoln County. I am writing in support of SB394. In processing ballots, I have noticed a good percentage of our elderly and disabled voters already vote by mail through the absentee process.

Over the past year with the primary and general elections of 2008, many of the voters in Lincoln County showed an interest in mail ballot elections. With the rising prices of gasoline and weather being factors in the polling process, people are ready for an easier way to vote. What could be easier than voting in your own home?

The amount of money that the mail ballot process would save the counties in our state is very hard to ignore. I know Lincoln County could use the money in many other places.

Please support SB394 and let the mail ballot process prove itself.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jill Blomdahl".

Jill Blomdahl
Deputy Clerk

**PONDERA COUNTY
MONTANA**



**Office of
Clerk and Recorder
and
Election Administrator**

*Janice Hoppes
Clerk and Recorder
Pondera County
20 Fourth Ave SW, Ste 202
Conrad, MT 59425-2340*

*Phone (406) 271-4000
Fax (406) 271-4070
email: clerkrec@3rivers.net*

March 19, 2009

Representative Dennis Himmelberger
and Members of the House State Administration Committee

Dear Chairman Himmelberger and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of myself as Election Administrator for Pondera County and the many voters from my county that have expressed their desire for mail-in ballot elections in Montana, I urge you to recommend a do pass on SB394.

Mail ballot elections have been used in Pondera County for municipal, school and special district elections for the past 13 years. The voters frequently comment that they appreciate the ease of voting in their own homes and the ability of taking their time and being able to investigate an issue or a candidate before marking their ballot, even if they have begun to vote.

For myself, I appreciate having the questions asked of me or my office staff, not the judges at the polling places who are dealing with many concerns that distract them. There can also be inconsistent answers from one polling place to another, just because of the judges' memory from training. I have direct resources in my office to consult the statutes or call the Secretary of State should there be a need and all voters receive the same answers and explanations.

I also like being able to check the signature and follow-up on any questionable signatures with the voter. At the polling place, a person could bring in a neighbor's utility bill and vote that person's ballot! There is no other ID required and no signature checking required.

I respectfully request your support of SB394.

Sincerely,

Janice Hoppes
Janice Hoppes

SHERIDAN COUNTY

CLERK AND RECORDER SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

100 West Laurel Avenue
Plentywood MT 59254-1699

406.765.3403
406.765.2609 Fax
record_supt@co.sheridan.mt.us
www.co.sheridan.mt.us

June A. Johnson

March 17, 2009

Dear Members of the Committee,

I am in support of SB394 a bill that expands the types of elections for which a mail ballot election may be conducted.

In small counties with an aging population, mail ballot elections make a lot of sense. Older voters once insisted on casting their ballots at the polls on Election Day. Now they usually prefer to stay at home, especially in November. The younger voters often like to vote absentee because their schedules are full.

The weather has been a consideration, also. In November of 2000, we had a major snow and ice storm. As a result, many people in Westby and Dagmar were unable to vote at all, and when it came time to count the votes, the retrieval of the ballots required a big effort. After that year we've noticed a steady increase in absentee applications. The percentage of absentee ballots cast in 2002 was 19.8%, in 2004 it was 28.4%, in 2006 it was 38.3%, and in 2008 it was 44.8%.

We need to make the opportunity to vote available to everyone and as convenient as possible. We also need to do what we can to protect the integrity of elections in Montana. Mail-in ballot elections go a long way toward accomplishing both goals. Also, in this financial climate, we have an even greater responsibility to handle public funds carefully. We projected what the 2008 General Election would have cost had it been a mail ballot election. The projection was \$7,966.57 compared to the actual cost of \$12,956.24. A savings of 39%!

Thanks for your consideration.

Sincerely,



June A. Johnson

SHERIDAN COUNTY

ELECTIONS ADMINISTRATOR

100 West Laurel Avenue
Plentywood MT 59254-1699

406.765.3403
406.765.2609 Fax
record_supt@co.sheridan.mt.us
www.co.sheridan.mt.us

March 16, 2009

Dear Committee persons:

I think mail ballot is the way to go. Currently we have 611 permanent absentee voters, which is about 25% of Sheridan County Voters.

This tells me that people like the idea of voting by mail. Sheridan County towns have used mail ballots for several years and last election there was a 75% to 80% turnout in towns that had no competition on the ballot. Mail ballots elections as a rule cost less, as Judges are not required all day, there is only a counting board. Results are available shortly after 8:00pm on election night as the counting board comes in at about 5:00pm and are done counting by 7:30 or 8:00.

It is our practice to do everything we can to deliver a ballot to a voter who has moved. If a ballot comes back undeliverable, we try to locate the voter and resend the ballot.

If people have just moved into the area they will have to come to the office and do a late or same day registration and we will issue them a ballot at that time.

Sincerely,



Mary Lynch, Elections Administrator

Wibaux Co. Clerk & Recorder/Superintendent of Schools**Patricia Zinda PO Box 199 Wibaux, MT 59353-0199****Phone: 406-796-2481****Fax 406 -796-2625**

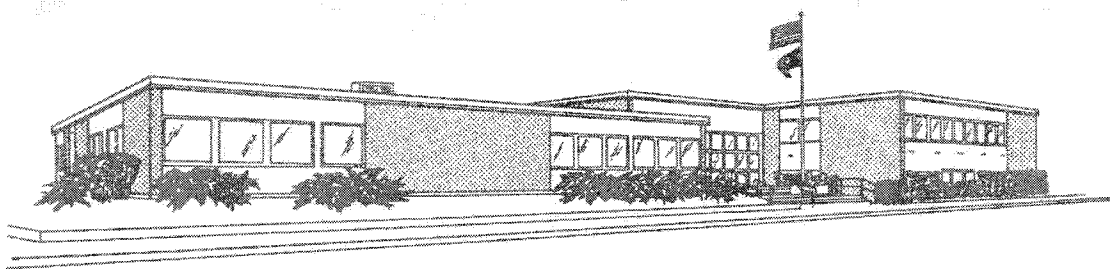
March 11, 2009

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

FROM: PATRICIA ZINDA
WIBAUX COUNTY CLERK & RECORDER

I would like to urge your support for SB 349 to expand the elections that may be done by mail ballot. We have done Municipal elections in our county with improved voter turn out. The City council, community and my office has been satisfied with the results. We will conduct the election by mail ballot again this year.

Please consider doing the General elections. I think Montana would be pleased with the results.



Office of:
County Commissioners
Phone 377-3562
Adam J. Garner, Chairman
Douglas A. Buxbaum
James Skillestad

County of Dawson

207 W. Bell
Glendive, MT 59330

March 16, 2009

Office of:
Clerk and Recorder
Phone 377-3058
Shirley A. Kreiman
Office of:
County Treasurer
Phone 377-3026
Vickie Boje

TO: Members of the Committee:

We are writing this letter in support of SB 394, mail ballot elections.

This committee has heard many of the pros and cons for this bill allowing each county the option of running all elections by mail ballot, including federal and state elections. Some of the reasons we support this bill are:

With the economic situation facing Montana as well as the nation, the cost of running elections is becoming increasingly expensive. Recruiting and training judges to work from 6:00 am to 10:00 pm is perhaps the largest expense. It is getting harder and harder to find young people to work as a judge because the majority of the younger voters have full-time jobs and can't take time away from their jobs to work an election. The majority of the judges in our area are 75-85 years young, with one in her 90s. How long can they fulfill the duties of a precinct judge? And with the new machines (counting and automarks) required by the federal government, many of the older judges are not comfortable running the machines (many are computer illiterate).

With Dawson County considered a rural area, it is sometimes inconvenient for the farmers and ranchers to get to their precincts to vote because of weather and travel conditions. If they had ballots delivered to their homes four weeks prior to the election, they could take their time to study the issues and candidates before voting.

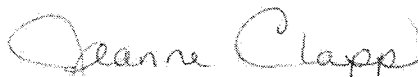
We believe voter turnout would substantially increase with a mail ballot election. In Dawson County during the last general election in November, 2008, there were 2,241 absentee voters and 2,088 precinct voters. Dawson County had 153 more absentee voters than voters who went to the polls to vote. The number of absentee voters has increased ever since the permanent absentee voting started; therefore, this shows us that voters in Dawson County seem to prefer voting by mail.

Members of the Committee
March 16, 2009
Page Two

We hope that you will vote to pass this bill. Thank you.

Sincerely,

DAWSON COUNTY, MONTANA



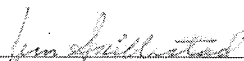
Jeanne Clapp, Election Administrator



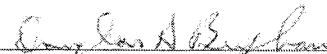
Shirley A. Kreiman, Clerk and Recorder
Deputy Election Administrator



Adam J. Gartner, Chairman
Board of County Commissioners



Jim Skillestad, Member
Board of County Commissioners



Douglas A. Buxbaum, Member
Board of County Commissioners

POWDER RIVER COUNTY
PO Box 200
Broadus, Montana 59317

Karen D. Amende
Clerk and Recorder

Phone: 406-436-2361
Fax: 406-436-2151
E-mail: kamende@prco.mt.gov

March 13, 2009

Representative Dennis Himmelberger, Chairman
State Administration Committee
Montana House of Representatives
PO Box 200400
Helena, MT 59620-0400

Dear Representative Himmelberger :

Please support SB 394 to allow mail ballot election, sponsored by Senator Keith Bales.

I am the Clerk and Recorder/Election Administrator in a small eastern Montana county. My reasons for supporting this bill may be quite different than those of larger counties.

We don't have trouble getting election judges; we don't have long lines or polling place intimidation. We do, however, have a large number of our voters who work in other areas and have to vote by absentee ballot. The percentage of voters who voted absentee ballot increased from 20.2% in the 2006 General to 29.8% in 2008 General. Their reasons for voting absentee vary, but the trend will continue. Now we have the expense of the increased absentee voting, plus the cost of setting up 8 polling places. A recent survey of counties shows that if mail ballot elections had been held in 2008, a savings of approximately \$4 million tax dollars would have been saved.

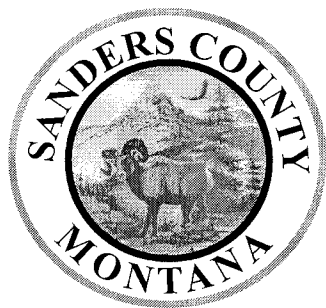
Our office has conducted four county-wide mail ballot elections. The procedures for mail ballot elections are very precise, ensure security, ballot secrecy, provide signature verification with methodical handling of ballots. If a person doesn't receive a ballot and thinks he/she should have gotten one, we can easily research the issue and handle it.

I know your time is limited so I will say no more, except please support this bill.

Thank you,

Sincerely,

Karen D. Amende
Clerk and Recorder/Election Administrator
Powder River County



SANDERS COUNTY

CLERK AND RECORDER/ASSESSOR/SURVEYOR

March 13, 2009

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I have been a Clerk & Recorder for 2 years. I didn't work in the Clerk & Recorders office before I was elected to office, so I was unfamiliar with the whole behind the scenes election process, as I think most voters are. General Election night, since I ran unopposed, I was able to be in the Elections office and watch the process. I was astounded at the amount of work running an election is. Since then I have learned that obviously election night is just the culmination of two years of learning new and changing laws, learning a changing Mt Votes program to keep up with the changing laws, keeping track of voters, and training mostly elderly judges who have a hard time keeping up with the changing laws.

Changes in the late registration laws have been the hardest for my office. Because we are a small county, we can't afford to have a separate elections office. Not only do we have elections, but we also have our regular day to day work to do. From Close of Registration on October 6 to election day, late registrations and election preparations disrupt regular business on a daily basis. With the continuing changes in law, it won't be long before we are forced to have a separate elections office putting an additional burden on our taxpayers. With Mail Ballot elections we would be able to prepare for the elections much more efficiently and at a much lower cost.

Sanders County's voters chose absentee ballots by 47% in the 2008 General Election.

Please listen to what voters are trying to tell you.

Please pass SB394.

Respectfully,

Jennine Robbins

Sanders County Clerk & Recorder



REGINA PLETTENBERG
ELECTION ADMINISTRATOR
215 SOUTH 4TH STREET, SUITE C
HAMILTON MT 59840
(406) 375-6550
rplettenberg@ravallicounty.mt.gov

March 10, 2009

Members of the Committee:

The Election Administrators in Montana are asking that you please vote yes on SB 394. My decision to ask your support on this bill is not something I have taken lightly. I have worked in the election office for 11 years now. When I first started, very few of our voters were voting absentee. One person could run the absentee center for the month preceding the election and still have time to get all of the supplies ready, answer the phones and assist the election judges on Election Day.

It is no longer that way. Now it takes a crew to run the absentee counting center, another crew to put together the supplies and work with the election judges, another crew to test and help with the voting equipment, another crew to run the late registration center and yet another crew to answer the phones on election day. In this past Presidential General election, Ravalli County issued more than 9,000 absentee ballots, which equals about 40% of the ballots cast. We had late registration on election day with 175 voters showing up at the courthouse to register and vote. We had 11 polling places with roughly 200 judges and about 13,000 voters. We had the "advocates" electioneering 100 feet away from the polling place doors. All of this generates hundreds of phone calls from voters needing to know if they are registered, where they go to vote, or why are we not stopping the people who are holding up signs 100 feet away from the polling places. Not to mention the phone calls from our election workers at the polling places who need questions answered in order to do their job.

Elections are more complicated and it is getting harder and harder to find people who are willing to work them. Our county has run most of its local elections (fire, irrigation, municipal and school bond) by mail ballot for about 20 years and it has been well received by the voters. I recently had letters printed in our local papers where I asked for input from our citizens on the mail ballot option and I have received very positive feedback. It seems like every where I go these days someone stops me to let me know that they read my letter and that they support mail ballot voting.

The election administrators are the elected officials who run the elections in our state. Our main concern is to protect the integrity and accessibility of our elections. We would not support a voting process this strongly unless we truly believed it was in the best interest of our voters and the election process. Please vote yes on SB 394. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,


Regina Plettenberg
Ravalli County Election Administrator

PHILLIPS COUNTY

COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

TROY BLUNT
RICHARD DUNBAR
LESLEY ROBINSON

CLERK & RECORDER

LAUREL N HINES

TREASURER/ASSESSOR

JEAN MAVENCAMP

SHERIFF/CORONER

THOMAS K MILLER



CLERK OF COURT

IRIS ROBINSON

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

VIVIAN TAYLOR

COUNTY ATTORNEY

EDWARD A AMESTOY

JUSTICE OF THE PEACE

GAYLE STAHL

DISTRICT JUDGE

JOHN C McKEON

February 27, 2009

Dear Members of the Committee:

Please **support SB 394** providing the option of Mail Ballot Elections. Mail Ballot Elections give every voter the same opportunity to vote.

Advantages of voting by mail include:

- 1) no voter has to request a ballot, one is automatically mailed to every active voter
- 2) voters do not have to "remember to go vote", thereby creating a higher voter turnout
- 3) voters do not have to be concerned about the weather and the ability to get to the polls
- 4) every voter has privacy
- 5) every ballot is secure
- 6) increased election integrity with signature verification

As well as the many advantages to every voter, we can conduct a professional election with all the securities in place at an annual taxpayer savings of \$2,000,000 to \$3,000,000 statewide.

Again, I urge you to **support SB 394** and give Montana the opportunity to continue to lead the way in providing fair, efficient and honest elections for **all** voters.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Laurel N Hines

Laurel N Hines
Phillips County Clerk & Recorder
PO Box 360, Malta MT 59538
(406) 654-2423
email: clerkrecorder@phillipscounty.mt.gov

**BLAINE COUNTY
CLERK AND RECORDER
SANDRA L. BOARDMAN
P. O. Box 278
Chinook, MT 59523-0278
(406) 357-3240
(406) 357-2199 Fax**

February 27, 2009

To the Members of the Committee,

RE: SB 394

I am in support of SB 394. In my county I am working to increase voter turnout. When I met in January with the Fort Belknap Tribal Council on another issue, I had asked them if they had any ideas on why the voter turnout is low on the reservation. A council member stated that he felt a lot of that was due to that they did not own a vehicle or couldn't afford gas for their vehicle to get to the polls to vote. I feel that the mail ballot would help this situation.

Thank you for your time and I hope that you will do a DO PASS on SB 394.

Sincerely,

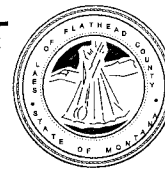


Sandra L. Boardman
Blaine County Clerk & Recorder



PAULA ROBINSON
FLATHEAD COUNTY ELECTION DEPARTMENT

ELECTION ADMINISTRATOR
800 South Main - Kalispell, Montana 59901
Phone (406) 758-5535
Fax (406) 758-5877



February 17, 2009

RE: Senate Bill 394

To: Senator Zinke
Senator Tutvedt
Senator Barkus
Senator Jackson
Senator Bruggeman

Dear Senators,

We would like to request your support for Senate Bill 394. We support this bill because it offers to the voters what they are asking for and it enables the County Election Administrators the flexibility that is needed to ensure that elections are run as economically as possible while maintaining the accuracy and transparency that we have worked diligently to demonstrate.

The benefits of mail ballot elections as opposed to how we are voting now are extremely significant. Mail ballots:

Are much less expensive to administer - If allowed to run the 2010 elections by mail ballot, the cost savings will be close to \$2,000,000.00. To the counties who are suffering through tough economic times, that is a significant amount of money.

Allow greater accessibility to your voters - Rather than having to navigate the difficulties of requesting an absentee ballot, this bill would have ballots mailed out to each active voter 4 weeks before the election. There is no more accessible way of voting than to have it mailed to your residence.

Give the voters what they already are asking for - In Montana nearly 50% of the voters in the past Presidential Election voted by mail through the absentee process and their response to it was overwhelmingly favorable.

Allow greater control and integrity - Every ballot returned is verified to ensure that the voter signs the affidavit envelope and that their signature matches their registration card. Additionally, the ballot is mailed to the mailing address of the voter and is not "forward able", ensuring that ballots are not delivered to the wrong person.

MISSION STATEMENT

Protect and promote accurate and impartial free and open elections while encouraging active participation by all citizens of Flathead County.

Allow election officials to properly handle the late registration process - Without the worry of thousands of election workers in hundreds of polling places on Election Day, it allows greater concentration and emphasis on the late registration process and ensures that each voter is handled efficiently and correctly.

Allow the voter the time to make informed decisions – Often a voter in the poll booth will discover there are candidates or issues of which they were unaware. At this point it is too late. With mail ballots, the voter can take the necessary time and do the necessary research to make a good decision.

The Clerk and Recorder and Election Administrators across the state are unanimous in their support of mail ballots. As the ones who have to consider the voting rights of **ALL** of our electors, it is clear that this is the way Montana needs to be moving. By moving to the option of mail ballot elections we will still have the most accessible voting process of any state in the nation. By allowing late registration as well as voting by mail, Montana will continue to lead the way in providing fair, efficient and honest elections.

Since the inception of the Permanent Absentee list two years ago, the number of people requesting this service has risen to where now we have 23% (11800) of Flathead County's active voters requesting absentee ballots for every election. We anticipate that the next Federal Election in 2010 will add thousands to that number as people continue to realize how convenient the absentee ballot is to incorporate into the active lifestyles of our modern generations.

In closing, this bill offers the Election Administrators the **option** of running any election by mail ballot, it doesn't require they are by mail ballot.

If you have any questions or would like to speak with me personally regarding this legislation, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paula Robinson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Paula Robinson
Flathead County Election Administrator

OFFICE OF THE CUSTER COUNTY CLERK & RECORDER

Marie Wehri, Clerk & Recorder, Registrar, Election Administrator

1010 Main Street

Miles City, Mt 59301-3419

(406) 874-3343 FAX (406) 874-3452

March 10, 2009

Montana Legislature
Helena, MT

Dear Members of the Committee,

Regarding my request for your support for SB-394, Mail Ballot Elections:

Election Administrators are elected officials and have a responsibility to their constituents. This bill would provide local control over elections to allow officials to determine what is in the best interest of All the voters in their county. This is an optional process up to the discretion of the Election Administrator and the County Commissioners. Some other advantages to a Mail Ball Election are:

- Allows for public input before a decision is made
- Provides greater accessibility
- Allows Election Administrators to handle the elections and maintain the integrity of the process
- No waiting in line
- No confusion about where to go to vote and no polling place intimidation
- No need to hire and train poll workers
- Allows time for voter to make well-informed decisions
- Increased voter turnout
- Saves millions of Montana tax payer dollars

Montana Election Administrators have a good reputation for conducting honest and fair election and do not compromise the integrity of the ballot – ever. We will continue this practice and work very hard to maintain our reputation. We will continue to assist the voters by extending hours at the election offices to accommodate the late registrants.

Thank you for your support and appreciate your willingness to help move Montana's election process forward in this 21st Century.

Respectfully submitted,

Marie Wehri, Custer County Clerk & Recorder/Election Administrator

Members of the Committee,

The voters in Valley County ask for mail ballots! The number of absentees are raising each election. Several electors wil request absentees and ask our office why don't we just mail them to all of the voters. Mail ballots would make elections more accessible to electors. Also, elections are expensive and mail ballot elections would reduce the expenses for the county governments. Mail ballot election would allow each county election office quality time with late registration. The polls wouldn't be open on election day, therefore attention to the late registrant would be more relaxed and accurate. Please consider the option of mail ballot election to offices that run the election! Thank you, Lynne Nyquist-Valley Co

3-3-2009

Honorable Members of the Committee,

RE: Mail Ballot Legislation

Election Administrators throughout the State of Montana would like to bring a bill (SB394) to your attention that we are in support of, which would allow each County in the State of Montana the option to run all of the elections, including Federal and State Elections, by mail ballot.

Fallon County has been running some of our Special and Municipal Elections by mail ballot, such as the Hospital Mill Levy Elections, North Baker Water Sewer District Elections, City of Baker and Town of Plevna Elections. As of this time we have never had the option, by Montana Statute, to run Federal or State Elections through the mail ballot process.

Thank you for your consideration of SB394.

Respectfully,
Brenda Wood, Election Administrator
Debbie Wyrick, Deputy Election Administrator
Kathy, Election Clerk
Cindy, Kathy and Josie, Clerks

Granite County Clerk and Recorder

Blanche McLure

P.O. Box 925

Philipsburg, Montana 59858

Phone: (406) 859-3771

Fax: (406) 859-3817

February 26, 2009

Members of the Committee

Please support SB 394. This is a simple change allowing (at the local level) how we want our election held, at the polls or by mail.

We have sent ballots through the mail for years now with great success by holding mail ballot elections and sending out absentee ballots. We now have a permanent absentee list that is growing by leaps and bounds every election. With the amendments added to this bill if we hold a public hearing and the electors want to go to the polls that is what we will do. The increasing cost of poll elections make this a very cost effective way to hold elections and still uphold the integrity of voting.

Sincerely,

Blanche McLure
Granite County Election Administrator

Jefferson County
Clerk and Recorder

P. O. Box H
Boulder, Montana 59632

Bonnie Ramey
County Clerk and Recorder
Carla Matlack
Deputy



SB 394

Mail ballot elections are not new to Montana. I have been conducting mail ballot elections for fire, water and sewer districts, municipal and other special districts every year since 1987.

The benefits of mail ballot elections as opposed to how we are voting now are extremely significant. Mail ballots:

Are much less expensive to administer - If allowed to run the 2010 elections by mail ballot, the cost savings for Jefferson County would be approximately \$18,000.00. In these tough economic times that is a significant savings to the taxpayers of this county.

Allow greater accessibility to your voters - Rather than having to request an absentee ballot, this bill would have ballots mailed out to each active voter before the election. There is no more accessible way of voting than to have it mailed to your residence.

Give the voters what they already are asking for - In Montana nearly 50% of the voters in the past Presidential Election voted by mail through the absentee process and their response to it was overwhelmingly favorable. **One third of Jefferson County's voters voted by absentee ballot in Nov. 2008.**


Allow greater control and integrity - Every ballot returned is verified to ensure that the voter signs the affidavit envelope and that their signature matches their registration card. Additionally, the ballot is mailed to the mailing address of the voter and is not "forwardable", ensuring that ballots are not delivered to the wrong person. If a ballot is not received by the voter, Montana Law and administrative rules provide for a replacement ballot to be issued.

Allow election officials to properly handle the late registration process - We will be able to focus on the late registration process and ensure that each voter is handled efficiently and correctly.

Allow the voter the time to make informed decisions - Often a voter in the poll booth will discover there are candidates or issues of which they were unaware. With mail ballots, the voter can take the necessary time to research the issues and candidates so they can make an informed decision.

The Election Administrators across the state are unanimous in their support of mail ballots.

Please support SB 394.


Bonnie Ramey
Jefferson County
Election Administrator

Accounting Techs

Tracy Juve, Deputy
406-653-6253

Pat Baker
406-653-6233

Fax Line
406-653-6289

County of Roosevelt



Clerks

Jan Pankratz, Deputy
406-653-6250

Donna Ross
406-653-6251

Darlene Twitchell
406-653-6252

Cheryl A. Hansen, Clerk & Recorder

400 2nd Avenue South

Wolf Point, MT 59201

406-653-6229

E-mail: chansen@rooseveltcountry.org

Members of the Committee:

I am writing this letter asking you to please vote in favor of SB 394.

In these difficult economic times, it only makes sense for the 2009 Legislature to give counties the opportunity to save taxpayer dollars on the cost of elections in the State of Montana. Mail ballot elections can accomplish this savings.

Year after year it gets more and more difficult to find election judges in Roosevelt County. Mail ballot elections would eliminate this problem.

Mail ballot elections will increase the integrity and control of the election process.

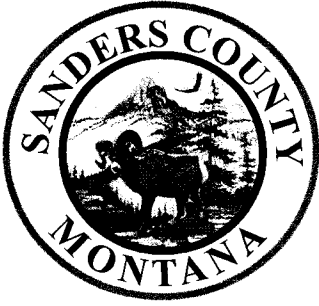
I have been conducting mail ballot elections in the 6 cities and towns of Roosevelt County since 1997. These elections have been very successful and the voter turnout has been substantially higher.

Please give us the chance to show how successful mail ballot elections can be in Montana.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Cheryl A. Hansen
Clerk and Recorder, Roosevelt County, Montana



SANDERS COUNTY

CLERK AND RECORDER/ASSESSOR/SURVEYOR

March 13, 2009

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I have been a Clerk & Recorder for 2 years. I didn't work in the Clerk & Records office before I was elected to office, so I was unfamiliar with the whole behind the scenes election process, as I think most voters are. General Election night, since I ran unopposed, I was able to be in the Elections office and watch the process. I was astounded at the amount of work running an election is. Since then I have learned that obviously election night is just the culmination of two years of learning new and changing laws, learning a changing Mt Votes program to keep up with the changing laws, keeping track of voters, and training mostly elderly judges who have a hard time keeping up with the changing laws.

Changes in the late registration laws have been the hardest for my office. Because we are a small county, we can't afford to have a separate elections office. Not only do we have elections, but we also have our regular day to day work to do. From Close of Registration on October 6 to election day, late registrations and election preparations disrupt regular business on a daily basis. With the continuing changes in law, it won't be long before we are forced to have a separate elections office putting an additional burden on our taxpayers. With Mail Ballot elections we would be able to prepare for the elections much more efficiently and at a much lower cost.

Sanders County's voters chose absentee ballots by 47% in the 2008 General Election.
Please listen to what voters are trying to tell you.
Please pass SB394.

Respectfully,
Jennine Robbins
Sanders County Clerk & Recorder



SANDERS COUNTY

CLERK AND RECORDER/ASSESSOR/SURVEYOR

March 18, 2009

Dear Committee members:

I have been an employee in the clerk and recorder's office for Sanders County for 10 years. My main job is elections. I have watched and been involved as the election process as grown and changed over the years. I am writing to show my support for Senate Bill No. 394.

Sending each qualified elector their ballot in the mail gives them the perfect opportunity to vote in a comfortable environment and in total privacy. They also can vote at their own convenience. This is the ideal situation for all voters - with or without disabilities. In a mail ballot election all voters are equal with the same opportunity. I believe there are handicapped people out there that would like to vote, but do not know about absentee voting, do not want to ask for the help or do not have a person to bring them to the polling site. This is very unfortunate.

The expense of judges training would be reduced and the cost of maintaining the auto marks would be saved. During the general election in 2008, no one used or asked to use the auto marks even though they were set up and in plain sight for the voters.

Mail ballot elections are a benefit to all voters. They get their ballot before Election Day; have the time, convenience and a comfortable environment to place their vote. They have the option of returning the ballot by mail or bringing it to the Election Administrators office. Mail ballots also allow more control over the election process. You wouldn't have the problems at the polling sites with the judges being unsure of how to handle voters and the different situations that arise. The problem of provisional voting would be lessened because a voter's identification and verification would be handled right at the election office instead of trying to take care of it from the polling site.

I believe mail ballots offer more benefits than disadvantages to the election process and am hoping that you will pass this bill.

Respectfully yours,

Lisa Wadsworth

FERGUS COUNTY

712 W Main St * Lewistown, MT 59457

Ph: 406-535-5242

Fax: 535-9023

elections@co.fergus.mt.us

Rana J. Wichman

Clerk & Recorder
Election Administrator

Misti Wood

Deputy Clerk & Recorder
Election Deputy

Kim Manseau

Recording Clerk
Election Clerk

February 26, 2009

House State Administration Committee
Montana House of Representatives
PO Box 200400
Helena, MT 59620

Re: Senate Bill 394

Members of the Committee:

The Fergus County Clerk & Recorder's office would like to express our support for SB 394. In Fergus County, our office has conducted several mail ballot elections for Fire Districts and just recently began conducting municipal elections by mail ballot. With the ever growing number of electors requesting absentee ballots for federal and state elections along with the complexity and cost of these elections, the option to conduct these elections by mail ballot seems like a good choice for our state. During the 2008 Presidential election, 43% of Fergus County electors voted by absentee ballot, which means they did not vote at the polling place. There is a reason why so many electors chose to vote by mail. Following is a list of advantages to mail ballot elections:

1. **No worry about missing an election** – With everyone's busy schedule, it would be easy to forget to vote on Election Day. However, with mail ballot, the ballot will automatically be mailed to you.
2. **Vote in the comfort of your own home** – In November 2008, many absentee voters expressed how great it was to vote at home. Home is the one place where the majority of people are the most comfortable. There is no rush and an elector is able to research candidates and issues to make a well-informed decision.
3. **No traveling several miles to vote** – Many farmers and ranchers requested an absentee ballot in 2008 so they would not have to travel several miles to the polling place on Election Day. In the rural areas of Fergus County, on average an elector will travel 20-25 miles one way to their designated polling place to vote. With the recent price of gas, the cost of postage to return a voted ballot saves the elector money.
4. **No worry about bad winter weather** – In our area of the state, good old Montana winter weather can jump upon us at any time. It is not uncommon for us to have a snow blizzard on Election Day in November. Of course, this could very well prevent electors from being able to vote.
5. **No waiting in lines** – This was probably the number one reason heard from electors on why they wanted to vote by mail in 2008. Fergus County has consolidated polling places within the city limits of Lewistown to help with the increasing costs of elections. Although the

consolidation has been well received by the electors of Fergus County; it has caused longer lines on Election Day.

6. **Lower election administration costs** – The State of Montana could have saved approximately \$4 million dollars of taxpayers' money, if mail ballot elections had been held in 2008.
7. **No need to make arrangements for childcare, transportation and time off from work** – This is a benefit to single mothers, senior citizens and lower income workers.
8. **Increased election process integrity with signature verification** – All electors must sign an affidavit on the outside of the envelope. The ballot is sealed and returned to the Election Office. Every voter signature is verified against their signature on file. Signatures are NEVER verified at the polling places.
9. **No worries about finding and training poll workers** – Currently Fergus County is not experiencing the problem of finding election workers like the larger counties, such as Yellowstone and Missoula County. However, our office is anticipating that we will be faced with the difficulty in the near future. Many of our workers are elderly and will soon need to retire. It is very hard encouraging the younger voter population to take part in this process.
10. **No confusion on where to go to vote** – With consolidation and redistricting, polling places often change. Our polling place consolidation happened in 2006 and still our office is bombarded with calls from voters inquiring about the location of their polling place.

Our office is committed to administering fair and accurate elections. We are dedicated to ensuring that each elector has the opportunity to exercise this very important right to vote. We envision several secure drop sites located throughout our county for those voters who do not want to mail their ballot. Automark voting machines would be available at every ballot drop site as well as the county courthouse and we will make every effort in informing the public of this.

We appreciate your consideration in supporting this bill and your hard work during this 2009 legislative session. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact either one of us at (406) 535-5242.

Sincerely,



Rana J. Wichman
Fergus Co. Clerk & Recorder
Election Administrator



Misti Wood
Deputy Election Administrator

CYNDY R. MAXWELL
BIG HORN COUNTY
CLERK AND RECORDER/ELECTION ADMINISTRATOR
PO BOX 908
HARDIN MT 59034
PHONE 665-9731 FAX 665-9738 Email cmaxwell@co.bighorn.mt.us

March 2, 2009

House State Administration Committee
PO Box 200400
Helena, MT 59620

RE: Senate Bill 394

Dear Committee Members:

You will soon be hearing Senate Bill 394, a bill that would give local governments the option of conducting Federal and State elections by mail ballot.

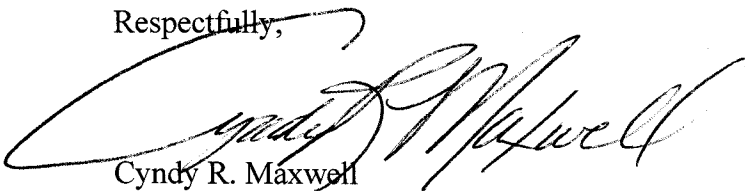
Every year, local election officials successfully conduct school district elections and every other year municipal elections using the current mail ballot laws.

Each Federal election year, these same officials conduct their Primary and General elections by both polling place voting and absentee voting. The growing interest in absentee voting statewide truly reflects how successful mail ballots could be.

The flexibility of this legislation provides each governing body the ability to choose the option which would best represent the voters of their counties through a public hearing processes.

I request that you support this legislation.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Cyndy R. Maxwell".

Cyndy R. Maxwell
Big Horn County
Clerk and Recorder/Election Administrator

Rosebud County

P.O. Box 47**Forsyth, Montana 59327****Commissioners:**

Daniel D. Watson
Danny Sioux
Beverly J. Nile

Clerk & Recorder:

Geraldine Custer

Treasurer:

Pam Shelton

Clerk of District Court:

Marilyn Hollister

**Attorney:**

Michael B. Hayworth

Superintendent of Schools:

Sharyn Thomas

Justice of the Peace:

Mary O'Hara Kunst

Sheriff:

Randy Allies

March 19, 2008

House State Administration Committee

Capitol Station

Helena, Mt. 59620

Dear Chairman Himmelberger and Members of the Committee:

I would like to submit this letter in Support of SB 394, the mail ballot election bill. We have been running mail ballot elections since the early eighties. The elections are very well received by the voters and have a much higher turnout than poll elections.

I am in support of SB 394, because it has become harder to hire and train election judges that can keep up with all the changes that keep coming down on election law. We have 20 county employees that serve as election judges in my county, because we cannot find regular electors to serve as election judges. The county employees are fine except it puts many of them in an overtime situation which ends up costing more to staff the polls.

I support SB 394 because over one fourth of my voters voted by mail last general election anyway, so as you can see this is very popular. Elections used to be a social event, but now people travel more and both people work, so the social aspect is not as important to today's voter.

In closing, please support Senate Bill 394 to let counties decide if mail ballot elections will be more beneficial to them. Thank you for all you do for all of us.

Sincerely,

Geraldine Custer, Rosebud County Clerk and Recorder

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, my name is William "Bill" Nyby and I reside at 241 S. Dodge St. in Plentywood, MT. I am chairman of the Sheridan County Commission.

I provide this written testimony to you and am in support of Senate Bill 394.

I am in favor of allowing local governments another option of conducting elections. This bill does not make it mandatory that the county election administrator must use this option, but gives them the flexibility of using this option if the local citizens and voters approve of this method. The bill provides for local input at a public hearing to inform the local governing body whether the public would prefer this method over the traditional voting method.

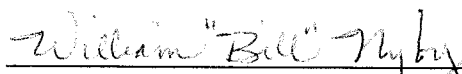
In the last two elections, Sheridan County residents and voters have exercised their right to use the absentee ballots that have been provided them. The percentage of voters using this method of voting has increased each election. Sheridan County's average age has been increasing steadily in the past 10-15 years. Mail ballot elections would provide these elderly people the opportunity to vote without having to travel to polling locations, which have become fewer due to consolidation to reduce county government expenses.

This type of election would also eliminate the possibility of not being able to vote due to weather. In the 2000 general election, Sheridan County experienced a winter storm and blizzard on Election Day that made travel extremely hazardous. Election ballots were delivered late to two polling locations. One of the locations required 3 Montana Department of Transportation snowplows to reach the polling location and the other required 2 county plows to reach their destination. The turnout of Sheridan County voters during this election was one of the lowest in county history.

This method of conducting an election would provide the local government with cost savings to the taxpayers, because fewer election judges would be needed to process the ballots. Local governments would also realize a cost savings in the operational expenses of the polling locations and the physical requirements of providing ADA compliance. It is always a good thing if government can show the taxpayers that they are being fiscally responsible and working towards getting the "most bang for their buck" when using tax dollars.

This bill also provides for safeguards for people with physical disabilities, because the election administrator is required to submit a written plan for conducting a mail ballot election to the Secretary of State. Within the written plan are mandated requirements to provide accommodations for people with physical disabilities that include the use of specialized voting equipment.

This is a good bill for local governments and I urge this committee to give it the utmost consideration. I thank you for the opportunity to submit my comments on this legislation and would appreciate your support of this bill as it is written.


William "Bill" Nyby, Sheridan County Commission

Office of the
BLAINE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

P.O. Box 278
Chinook, Montana 59523

Telephone (406) 357-3250

FAX (406) 357-2199

Don K. Swenson
Vic Miller
Dolores Plumage

Chair
Commissioner
Commissioner

February 26, 2009

To the Members of the Committee,

After conferring with our Clerk and Recorder, Sandra L. Boardman, and considering the issues surrounding SB 394, I stand in support of the bill. For small, rural counties, such as Blaine County, it is becoming increasingly more difficult to get election judges. In spite of repeated efforts, the election judges are aging and there is very little, if any, interest in younger people serving in this capacity.

Further, after having witnessed record turnouts for municipal elections for the Cities of Chinook and Harlem, I believe that mail balloting increases access and participation in the election process.

Additionally, I have noticed a cost savings in terms of using a mail ballot. While my experience has been limited to what I have witnessed in municipal elections, it is my understanding that mail balloting could result in a state-wide cost savings of \$2,000,000.

It is my further understanding that nearly 50% of the voters voted absentee through a mail ballot approach in the 2008 Presidential election cycle.

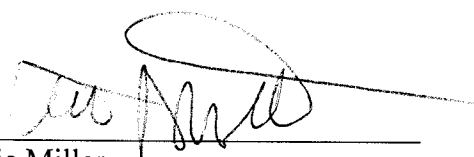
By allowing mail balloting, more time can be given in verifying signatures rather in the mad rush of an election day. Through this increase in control and integrity, more time is available for late registrations on Election Day.

In the comfort of one's home, a voter can take the time to study the issues and candidates and make more informed and involved decisions.

It is also my understanding that the mail ballot process is endorsed by all clerks and recorders across the state. As the chief election officials, it would seem to me that paying attention and adhering to what their collective experiences have to offer, we can afford our citizens better access, with better turnout and controls, and at a cost savings.

I urge a DO PASS on SB 394.

Sincerely,



Vic Miller
Blaine County Commissioner, District Three



SANDERS COUNTY

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

March 12, 2009

Mr. Chairman and Committee Members:

We would like to show our support for SB394. Taking into consideration the ease of the mail ballot for the handicapped and elderly, the ever increasing cost of elections, the changing election laws, and the increase in absentee voting, we feel that this is the obvious choice for the future. Each county in Montana has its own dynamics and we believe it should be the decision of each county to have a mail ballot election. In the past presidential general election in Sanders County 47% of our votes were absentee ballots. That trend is statewide, and we should be listening to that very distinct message.

Please pass SB394.

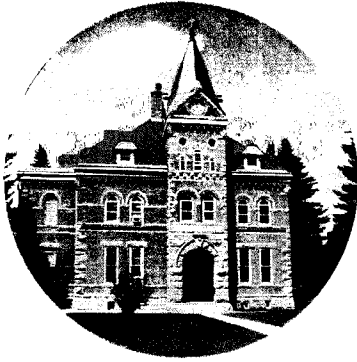
Sincerely,

Board of Commissioners
Sanders County, Montana

Carol Brooker, Chairman

J. Gail Patton, Commissioner

Anthony B. Cox, Commissioner



Jefferson County Commission

118 W. Centennial

Post Office Box H

Boulder, Montana 59632-0249

(406) 225-4025 Voice / (406) 225-4148 Fax

Tom Lythgoe, Chair Ken Weber, Commissioner Dave Kirsch, Commissioner

March 4, 2009

Re: SB 394

To the House State Administrative Committee:

It is the opinion of the Jefferson County Commission that mail ballot elections are a positive and beneficial change in our current election procedures. There has been a history of mail ballot elections in our county alone for fire, water and sewer districts, municipal and other special districts since 1987. Therefore this procedure is not new to the state of Montana and has proven itself productive and worthwhile.

It has come to our attention that running the 2010 elections by mail ballot would amount to a potential cost savings for Jefferson County of approximately \$18,000.00. Pertaining to fiscal issues, with that kind of savings, the passage of this bill would allow each county to determine what is financially best for their county.

One third of Jefferson County's voters voted by absentee ballot in Nov. 2008. In Montana nearly 50% of the voters in the past Presidential Election voted by mail through the absentee process and their response was amazing. We need to attract as many voters as possible and mailing out ballots to each voter before an election, directly to their residence allows for much greater accessibility to those voters.

It is the opinion of our Election Official that passage of this bill will allow greater control and integrity in an election. Every ballot returned is verified to ensure that the voter signs the affidavit envelope and that their signature matches their registration card. The ballots are mailed to the mailing address of the voter and may not be forwarded. If the ballot is not received there are provisions for a replacement ballot to be issued.

Mail ballot elections also provide election officials the opportunity to focus on the late registration process, assuring that each voter is handled consistently and efficiently. The mail in ballot also allows the voter time to study the issues and candidates, making for more informed decisions.

Again, the Jefferson County Commissioners are in unison in their full support of mail ballot elections. They ask that you, the Montana State Administrative Committee, lend their like support to SB 394.

Thank you,

Tomas E. Lythgoe, Chair
Jefferson County Board of Commissioners

Com: ch

CC: Reading File



1909

FERGUS COUNTY COURTHOUSE

CELEBRATING 100 YEARS

712 W. Main · Lewistown, MT 59457
Ph: 406-535-5119 · Fax: 406-535-9023
email: commissioners@co.fergus.mt.us

Commissioners:

John Jensen
Carl Seilstad
Ken Ronish



2009

March 10, 2009

House State Administration Committee
Montana House of Representatives
PO Box 200400
Helena, MT 59620

Re: Senate Bill 394

Chairman Himmelberger and Members of the Committee,

The board of Fergus County Commissioners would like to rise in support of Senate Bill 394.

In recent years we have seen a marked increase in the number of absentee ballots in our local elections. This tells us that our constituents are seeing this as a convenient and suitable way to cast their vote. Also, with the changes in the absentee voting rules and procedures, we are also seeing a better overall turnout in the number of votes cast.

As commissioners, we must be concerned with the costs associated with elections. We believe that with a mail ballot election the citizens of Fergus County would save considerable funds in the areas of administration, judges costs, precinct costs, and time.

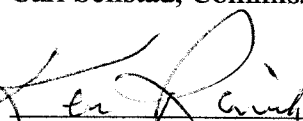
Fergus County, after an accessibility audit was required by the Secretary of States Office in 2006, determined that by consolidating precincts would make better financial sense than trying to upgrade polling places that the county only needs to use for elections every couple of years. By allowing mail ballot elections, the counties would be able to see additional cost savings.

Thank you for your time and consideration and we urge a Do Pass on Senate Bill 394.

Sincerely,


John Jensen, Chairman

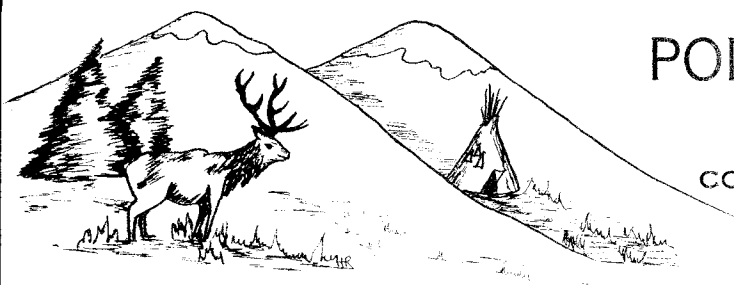

Carl Seilstad, Commissioner


Ken Ronish, Commissioner

To Whom It May Conern:

We support our Clerk and Recorder, Lynn Nyquist, and her request that we favor the effort to expand the list of types of elections that may be conducted by mail ballots, SB 394.

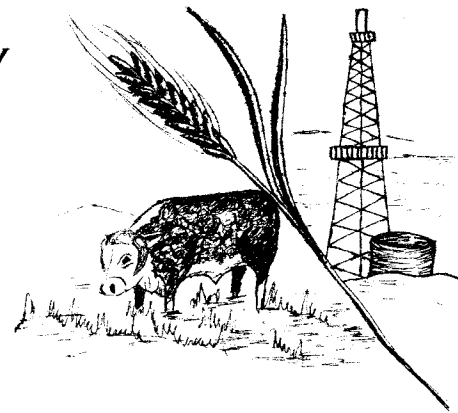
Bruce Peterson
for Valley County Commissioners



PONDERA COUNTY

20 4TH AVENUE S.W.

CONRAD, MONTANA 59425



March 19, 2009

House State Administration

Chairman Himmelberger, Members of the Committee,

For the record, we are the Pondera County Commissioners and we submit to you our hearty support for Senate Bill 394 to allow county election administrators to conduct any election by Mail Ballot. Pondera County has held several special elections in the last few years and every one was done by mail with an outstanding turnout and a judicial result. These elections, especially in smaller counties, are much less expensive. They require no election judges, no payments for voting areas, no additional judge training or travel expenses. We understand that large communities may not have the same argument, but the decision whether to hold a Mail Ballot Election should and would be optional with SB 394.

At a school board meeting, held recently in North Central Montana, the representative of the elected board publicly denounced this bill, saying "why would we support this bill and make it too easy for voters to stay home and check 'no'." This very statement should be your strongest encouragement to allow all elections to be by mail ballot. Why wouldn't we, as elected officials do everything in our power to MAKE it EASY for voters to vote?

Thank you for your dedication and service to the people of Montana. On behalf of our fellow commissioner Joseph Christiaens we appreciate your affirmative consideration of SB 394.

Sincerely,

Pondera County Commissioners

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Sandra J. Broesder".

Sandra J. Broesder, Chairman

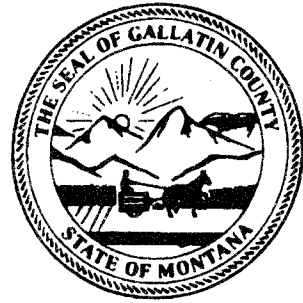
A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Cynthia A. Johnson".

Cynthia A. Johnson, Vice-Chairman

State of Montana

County of Gallatin

Bozeman



March 19, 2009

Members of the House State Administration Committee:

I support SB394. Counties should have the option of conducting mail ballot elections for all elections. Counties take their elections seriously and placing the question of having a mail ballot election on a public agenda for each election gives the public an opportunity to say yes or no.

In today's world, people are finding it more convenient to get their ballots in the mail. Time after time, voters come into our office so grateful that they are on the permanent absentee list. Many feel by getting their ballot early, they have time to read and study the candidates and issues and make a more informed choice.

A mail ballot election can save large amounts of taxpayer dollars in Montana. It will save a county, especially a large county, over a hundred thousand dollars. The money saved could better provide for the public health, safety, and welfare of its residents.

Mail ballots give the voters several advantages. A higher number of registered voters VOTE. The person who cannot get away from work has now the opportunity to vote. The single mother who would have to pay for a sitter can now vote without worry. The elderly person who may be driving on a nasty winter day now can stay in the comfort of their own home and vote. The person with a disability does not have the stress of finding a ride to the polls and does not have to wait in massive lines to vote.

As a Clerk and Recorder and Election Administrator, I am willing to go beyond expectations to help the person who needs personal assistance to vote. But as a whole, the taxpayers need a break from paying higher taxes because so many layers of state laws and federal mandates have made the voting process so complicated. As the process becomes more complex, more errors occur and the integrity of the election becomes at risk.

Please help your constituents and vote for SB 394.

Charlotte Mills

Charlotte Mills
Gallatin County
Clerk & Recorder/Election Administrator

March 19, 2009

Dear House State Administration Committee Members,

I am writing in support of SB 934. I support a mail ballot for Montana voters as a Gallatin County Election Clerk, Permanent Absentee voter, full-time college student, and Democrat.

As an Election Clerk in the past General Election, I experienced firsthand the inadequacies of the Montana voting process. The use of polling places is a strain on the county's resources of time, personnel, and money. Organizing the use of the buildings, finding and training of election judges, preparing the supplies, registers, and poll books takes many hours of time that could be better spent on the election itself rather than counting pens. In this struggling economy it is deplorable for our government to not be finding logical ways to decrease spending. Switching to a mail ballot system would save counties thousands of dollars, by eliminating the inefficient polling place election.

The training of the election judges has proven to be essentially useless, we had multiple trainings prior to and after the primary election, and the same mistakes continued to be made. I believe whole-heartedly that our judges are capable, well-meaning people. However, the election process has become so complex that it is intimidating to them.

The Permanent Absentee voting option has benefitted me greatly. I enjoy being able to have my ballot 30 days before an election, so that I may review my ballot and make educated choices. A mail ballot would allow all Montana voters the ability to make educated choices, rather than racing in and out of the poll both, frantically marking their ballot, due to the pressure they feel from the endless line waiting to vote behind them. I, like many of you, have a crazy schedule that changes from day to day and sometimes minute by minute. Even though I am a dedicated voter, it is impossible for me to know that on Election Day I would have time to drive to my polling place and wait in line to vote. It is inappropriate to make voters stand in-line for hours to vote, that may be expectable in other states, but being a Montana native I know that is not how we treat our fellow citizens.

I do understand that there are reasons for the polling place election. However, it has become outdated and ineffective. I believe Montana voters deserve a revamped, up-to-date, and cost effective election process.

Thank you for your consideration. Please vote in favor of SB 934.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Price Klaas". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Price Klaas

March 19, 2009

Dear House State Administration Committee,

I strongly support the passage of SB394. An election system that utilizes just mail ballot voting is a huge time, money and sanity saver for not just the election offices, but for the public as well. Not to mention how much safer mail ballot voting is from error and fraud than a traditional polling place election.

The time and money spent on a polling place election is more than anyone imagines due to the number of people working, the training, and the constant issues with finding willing, able and dependable election judges that listen to their training. The public spends hours waiting in line every day before an election to vote absentee just so that they don't have to go to their polling place on Election Day. The cost savings of just cutting down the daily lines would be amazing. But the biggest savings would be taxpayer dollars, which would then be freed up for other much needed venues. Just during the last Federal Election Gallatin County alone could have saved approximately \$100,000 by switching to a mail ballot.

Fraud and error are greatly reduced by mail ballot, because you have people working that are familiar with how an election works, what the rules are and if there are any questions they can be quickly and easily answered. It also frees up the election office and allows the clerks to focus on the voters instead of worrying about election judges and their constant situations all over the county. Also, the time spent finding and training judges, packing supplies, printing registers and trying to find a way to transport and lift AutoMarks and M-100's all over the county is no longer a worry with a mail ballot. All the workers can then get more rest and be more refreshed further decreasing errors. When the mail ballot is conducted completely in the election office all the voter records are right at the clerk's finger tips and any questions can be taken care of right then and there further improving the voter's happiness with voting.

I believe that the voters of Montana will appreciate a mail ballot and how much easier it makes voting for them. The time and cost savings of a mail ballot are tremendous and the integrity of the Montana voting system would greatly increase using mail ballot voting by decreasing error and fraud. Please vote **YES** for SB394. Thank You!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Megan H. Peterson".

Megan Peterson
Gallatin County Election Deputy

March 19, 2009

Dear House Senate Administration Committee,

My name is Lisl Scott and I am in favor of Senate Bill 394. I work in the Election Office for Gallatin County and being involved with the election process I can tell you firsthand how this bill will benefit the election offices or more importantly, the voters.

As you know this past Federal Election was an election to remember. There were many things that make it memorable but let us focus on what goes on behind the scenes. Many hours of work are taken to prepare for an election.

Reservations are made for each of the polling places, and then reconfirmed again to ensure they are still there. Each polling place has supplies to be packed and they don't have a small amount of supplies by any means. Trucks are rented and driven all over the county to deliver only part of the supplies. The judges pick up the other supplies. Our average age of judges increasingly gets older. Many of them are too weak to be able to lift many of the supplies. The combined weight of the ballots or the supply bags that contain, to name a few items, posters, tape, pens, books, and extension cords. Not to mention once they get to the polling place they need to move and lift the heavy equipment that was delivered the day before to set it up. As our voting process becomes more advanced, so does the technology. Many of the judges are intimidated by the computers now used to run an election. There was a point in time when being a judge at a polling place was a social event. You would see your neighbors and friends, each judge would bring a dish for lunch and it's a pot luck. Now people are rude, angry, in a hurry and are not the polite, well mannered people that they used to be.

What about younger judges you may ask? The younger generations are not interested in being polling judges. We tried to contact many organizations and younger people and didn't have much luck. We did have a few volunteer but they were unreliable and did not show up or canceled when called upon.

The judges also take an immense amount of effort to train. The time goes into getting a training set up and then calling all the judges is a great amount with little benefit. We trained our judges before the Primary, after the Primary and again weeks before the Federal Election and still the same simple mistakes were made. Many are set in their ways and see it as their way or the highway or they don't know how to do it and are embarrassed to ask, so they guess.

People make mistakes, but with the mail ballot we can keep these mistakes to a very minimal amount. The accuracy of an election is very important as well as upholding the integrity of the process.

Let's not forget that not only is the polling place full of voters, there are voters decided to vote absentee. All of those ballots need to be processed as well. All are checked to make sure all the signatures match. With computers that can be done in a heartbeat. There is the cost of stuffing and mailing those ballots but a far minor cost than a polling place election.

I, myself am an absentee voter. I as a citizen feel that I am more educated, and sure of my decision when I vote. I have had time to see who the candidates are, what they stand for and why my choice is the correct one. I don't feel rushed when I fill out my ballot at the kitchen table versus a crowded and noisy polling place. How many of you have children? We know they ask lots of questions. Why are we here, what are you doing? You can also turn an absentee ballot into a learning experience for a younger generation. You have time to explain the process and reasons for why you are doing what you do.

Back to the older generation. How many of them are unable to leave their home, because of disability or don't have a method of transport. They are still getting their chance to voice their opinion.

The mail ballot will eliminate the need for polling places and judges. We will not spend endless hours preparing, training, delivering and scheduling just to get a small portion of the election in order. It will provide a learning experience for a younger generation, as well as cut the cost of the whole process in half. The efficiency of the election will run smoother and the accuracy will be higher.

These are just a few of the many reasons why a mail ballot would be a smart choice and a cost effective one.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lisl Scott". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font. The "L" is large and loops around the "i". The "S" is also large and loops around the "c". The "t" is short and ends in a small hook.

Lisl Scott, Gallatin County Election Clerk

To The Legislature

I believe that mail in voting would be very helpful to most people. Seniors & even younger people need be considered.

I am 71 years old & have medical problems which make it hard for me to stand in line waiting to vote.

Younger people have young children & jobs that make it hard for them to get out & vote.

This change over should really be considered & made simple for everyone.

Sincerely,

Sally Helgren

To the Legislature

I am a Senior of 72 yrs. Old.
I have poor sight in one eye and
find it Hard to get out and Vote.

I believe that "Mail in Voting"
would be Very Beneficial for the
older, But Very important Citizens.

Please Help make it Happen.
Thank you Very Much.

Sincerely,

Gerald L Hazenka
802 River St.
Hamilton, Mt.